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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

13 August 1956

INTERNAL O/NE ONLY

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 62-56

SUBJECT: Short and "Short-Short" Conclusions

1. The thorny issue of how best to tailor the conclusions to our estimates so as to have the most impact on our customers was brought to a head by the NIE Survey. It revealed that many high policymakers seldom saw or at any rate read the NIE's themselves. Instead all they generally read were one page briefing memos, which most IAC agencies attached to the NIE before sending it forward. Therefore when the Conclusions of an NIE ran materially over this one page each agency unilaterally had to pare them down.

2. This situation led the AD/NE to feel that wherever possible NIE Conclusions should be kept down to what would fit onto a one-page briefing memo so that the agencies would be encouraged to use the Conclusions verbatim and not tinker with them. Where the Conclusions could not be kept this short, he favored adding a second set of "short-short" conclusions designed specifically for briefing memo purposes. The IAC agreed that we should experiment with short or where necessary "short-short" conclusions on a case-by-case basis (see O/NE Notice 6-56).

3. Proper Length Conclusions. We have received samples of briefing memos from the three IAC agencies which have used them in order to find out their average length and thus give ourselves a yardstick. These samples vary widely. In general G-2 appears to prepare the most comprehensive briefs, generally including all or almost all of the Conclusions with relatively little cutting or paraphrasing, even if they run over a page. The four G-2 samples ranged from 433 to 832 words.* AFOLN uses a much

* All word-counts include the Statement of the Problem and dissents, where taken.

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shorter and more informal statement of the "more significant" findings; its six samples ranged from 132 to 218 words. OIR's two one-page samples contained a good deal of paraphrasing and were about 300 words each.

4. It is noteworthy that JIG doesn't brief Conclusions; instead it sidelines the key ones as well as pertinent parts of the discussion. ONI also does not brief the Conclusions; instead it sends the estimate itself forward, and also summarizes it orally at the twice-weekly briefings for SECNAV and CNO. Moreover, State also has now abandoned the practice of preparing briefing memos for the Secretary and now sends only the NIE itself.

5. The above indicates both that we can be more flexible than we had previously supposed and that there are no common criteria for how long conclusions should ideally be. It remains highly desirable, however, that they be short enough for quick reading by those customers who get the NIE alone or to fit on a one page brief for those agencies which use them. Since it is obviously impossible to tailor all conclusions to one uniform length, we should probably try wherever feasible to keep them to no more than 350-400 words (including the Statement of the Problem). Of course, the shorter the better.

6. Two Sets of Conclusions. In those cases where we run only slightly over the above maximum, say to 450 words or so, it still seems worthwhile to use only one set, since a second set would essentially duplicate the first. The space problem could be met by minor trimming or paraphrasing by the briefers. Wherever we feel it essential to have materially longer conclusions, however, the staff should prepare two sets. In this case it seems best to keep the so-called "short-short" version really short (no more than 250 words where possible) because the longer version will also be available. These should be entitled "Short Conclusions" to differentiate them from the regular ones.

7. Long Conclusions Only. In some cases it may be either undesirable or infeasible to produce a second set of "Short Conclusions". NIE 11-4-56 is a case in point. Its omnibus conclusions would be extremely difficult to sum up on one page; moreover shouldn't even the highest level readers take enough time at least once a year to scan 3-4 pages summarizing the over-all Soviet picture. On such occasions we should probably recommend to the IAC that a short version be omitted as misleading.

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8. My Conclusion. My own feeling is that our conclusions have tended to run too long, with the truly major estimates too often submerged among many essentially secondary points. We also sometimes include too much descriptive or situational material ("Argentina is currently ruled by a provisional government..."). We should probably resist more the efforts of agency "experts" to spell out their own pet points. Of course different aspects of each problem may be important to different IAC agencies and we are in the business of producing inter-agency estimates. Mais chacun à son gout!

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Chief, Estimates Staff

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